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Russia—Present and Future

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International Committee of Young Mens' Christian Associations.

RUSSIA is reaping the whirlwind. For generations her autocrats and bureaucrats, her priests and teachers, her professional men and merchant princes have sowed the wind. Clothed with responsibilities, endowed with power, and faced with opportunities such as rarely fall to the lot of any leaders, they stupidly chose to dig a pit of selfishness. Blinded with their own conceits they overreached themselves, and plunged down headlong dragging their people with them. In all the hellish misery of the present hour in Russia, one hears from their lips no word of contrition and no plea for forgiveness. The Almighty may have mercy upon them, but in Russia they are already numbered among the damned.

CZARISM AND BOLSHEVISM

Bolshevism is the whirlwind; it is the offspring of czarism, but not more hideous either in principle or in method. Conceived in utter selfishness and in basest materialism it carries within its own bosom the seeds of its destruction. Like the parent tyranny from which it sprang, it is without conscience and without a god. "We are frankly anti-Christian," announced the head of the Bolshevik Bureau of Social Welfare to a representative of the Y. M. C. A.; to which the faith of a Christian replies, "Then you will fail."

Czarism has passed away; it was not truly Russian either in its spirit or in its working. It was founded on the sand; under the storm and flood of war it fell, and great has been the fall of it. Bolshevism, its child, also builds on the sands of class-rule, hatred, strife, jealousy and selfishness. It mocks international obligations and revels in intrigue. With audacious impertinence it seeks to override existing democracies and voices its claim to

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world dominion. One cannot imagine the consummation of its program, even in Russia. Any social structure which is to endure in Russia, must be founded upon the enduring rock of good in the character and the past experience of the Russian people.

THE RUSSIAN CHARACTER

One who has been through the agony of the past two years with Russians can realize how deep are the strata of love, forgiveness, patience and meekness; how universal the common sense and humor; how strong the mental fibre; how glowing the desire for knowledge; how wonderful the already developed capacity for coöperative effort; how rich the simple culture; how reverent and noble and genuine the religious life of this great people. No lust of conquest or imperial ambitions motivate them. The average Russian believes in the golden rule as a practical proposition. His fine idealism and rugged good sense will ultimately turn to confusion the counsel both of hypocritical bourgeoisie and demagogic bolshevist. It is in the faith that neither of these pretenders to authoritative speech voices the real mind and will of Russia, that one can view her present plight without despair or even trepidation, and look to her future with confidence and assurance.

One is not unmindful of the present woes and horrors which have overtaken this long-suffering people. Would that it were possible to blot from memory some of the unutterable infamies which have been perpetrated by both sides in this terrible civil war! Only too well known are the embittered ruthlessness and calculated terrors of the bolshevist program, both in its conception and in its execution. These men had good teachers. On the other hand are the arrogant, swaggering, imperialistic militarists, the record of whose deeds will make even the Prussian jealous when the scalpel of history bares it to the world. And what shall one say of those who follow in their wake, the soulless, vulturous creatures, who from their emigré havens outside of Russia have been calling upon the world to rescue their prey for them! Neither side in the Russian civil war has a monopoly of coup d'états, Chinese mercenaries and Machiavellian principles and methods. The great majority of the Russian people quite wisely prefer to endure stoically the pains of the present rather than cast in their

lot with either of the principal groups aspiring for power, for neither group knows what it is to respect public opinion, to have regard for ordered liberty, to love international morality, or to recognize the principles and practices of democracy. It is quite easy, entertaining and popular to paint the lurid and the outrageous. One may indulge in this pastime exclusively, may remain wholly faithful to the facts in every instance related, and with the mass of accumulated evidence may continue such portrayal almost indefinitely. Yet such a portrayal would not truly represent normal conditions in Russia today. As in the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, granted that every detail related could be substantiated, yet the aggregate impression conveyed is wrong. The dislocation in life, industry and transport is severe. The sufferings endured are often intense, but there is no such uninterrupted carnival of blood and crime, no such wallow of corruption, as the more picturesque reports would have one believe. There is less of disorder and suffering in bolshevik Russia, and less of stability in non-bolshevik Russia, than is generally indicated. Allowing for the effects of the war, the masses of the Russian people know little more of oppression today than they have known in generations past. Large sections of the country are comparatively quiet. The impairment of former conditions of life has not come quickly. The disruption of normal life began in 1914, and affairs have grown progressively worse from then till now. Individual and social adjustments have to some extent kept pace with misfortune and there has been no sudden or overwhelming collapse. The nearest approach to it followed the demobilization of the army. The only explanations for Russia's survival of that supreme test are found in prohibition, the average man's good sense, the faithfulness of the railway employes, and the wide distribution of the shock.

THE EFFECT OF THE EUROPEAN WAR

I entered Russia before the bolshevik revolution. The country had been three years at war. It had already been gutted as by fire. Vast areas had been swept over by the contending forces. Man-power, industry, financial stability and transport had been sacrificed to the terrible demands of the struggle with Germany. Twenty million men had been mobilized for the armies, and the

armies had suffered nine million casualties including prisoners. Agriculture, the principal industry, had suffered no less than manufacture. Roubles were selling for five cents in Vladivostok, and you can buy them no cheaper today. Bank credits were grossly over extended through war loans and speculative activities. The vice-president of the Zemsky Soiuz informed me in November, 1917, that the productive capacity of his organization—a fair example—in the Moscow district had fallen from 40 to 60 per cent during the preceding year. Trains were running from three days to a week late on the Trans-Siberian. The morale of the army was gone, and many competent observers, British, French, Belgian, and Czech soldiers, who had been fighting with the army, testify that there was little chance for the restoration of that morale after the disasters in the fall of 1916.

Russia was already prostrate when swept by the revolution. She was prostrate not only because of the corrupt and incapable leadership to which her destinies had been committed; not only because of her military defeats and economic insufficiency; but prostrate because her masses in their ignorance did not comprehend the significance of the conflict. If Russia was already prostrate in 1917, what has transpired since then may be viewed in the nature of a misdirected protest; a protest which aggravates rather than betters the misfortunes against which it is directed, but which can be greatly overestimated in its importance.

The person who fastens his attention upon the disasters of the war, or gives way to undue concern regarding bolshevism or attaches his hopes to the success of the Siberian, North Russian and other ostensible champions of constitutional government, will certainly fail in any just approximation of the future of Russia. These may all affect, but they will not determine, that future. There is so much bolshevism in anti-bolshevik Russia and so much anti-bolshevism in bolshevik Russia that the fate of the momentous issues at stake in Russia cannot possibly be decided by mere changes in battle lines or even by the rise and fall of temporary antagonists for power. The situation is far more baffling in its complexities; far more astounding in its contradictions; and far less susceptible of analysis or even intelligent observation than the majority of foreigners, who have been there, like to admit. The wise student of Russia's future will rather

seek to ascertain and study the great underlying currents of Russian life and thought. He will seek out the fundamental and substantial elements of former social organization and practice and the individual virtues that are universally recognized as significant in the lives and destinies of peoples who seek to be free.

THE FUTURE

The fundamental present facts which in my opinion have permanent bearing on Russia's future are:

1. Russia is rich in her natural resources, so wondrously rich that the average American literally has no conception of the tremendous possibilities of the great Slavic domain. Natural resources of this character are vital. Upon them national life may draw for its recuperation, if the will and the determination to recover are present. It is, therefore, to the characteristics of the Russian people and to their social institutions that one must address himself if he is to know whether Russia *will* recover.

2. The true Russian spirit is tolerant, democratic, spontaneous and unspoiled, if one may judge by the soldiers and the peasants. Wanting much in self-discipline and the spirit of compromise yet they knew not arrogance nor false pride, nor was there in them any servility; they were free men. One of them in the rapture of his freedom expressed it thus, "I have known what it is to be free. To have had one day of the revolution is better than all my previous existence."

3. The Russian temper is radical in its attitude toward political, social and economic problems. It is definitely intended that the old order shall not continue in the new nation which the people aspire to build. For example, in all of my travels in Russia, I did not meet with a single Russian who wished to see American social and economic civilization reproduced in his country. It is upon the vision of a better social order that the bolshevist régime has built up its power, but no one who knows the radicalism of the average Russian can for a moment believe that his conception of the better social order will permanently admit of the substitution of a new tyranny in place of the old.

Moreover, if Russia appears radical from our point of view, we should bear in mind that she may not be so radical from her own standpoint. Private property has never enjoyed the recog-

dition in Russia which it has in America and in western Europe. If in the working out of their social vision, the Russian people choose to modify still further the recognition which it has heretofore had, it will be but the confirmation of a tendency long since established.

4. Russia is rich in social experience as well as in natural resources, democratic in spirit and radical in temper. In his bitter struggle for a better world, the peasant has learned the value of coöperative enterprise. The coöperative buying, selling and banking organizations of Russia and Siberia are among the great institutions developed in former years. Except in a very limited sense, these great coöperatives have restricted themselves to buying and selling and banking, but it will be surprising indeed if the economic rehabilitation of Russia in manufacturing and mining does not come about through the application of the coöperative principles already well established. I see no other method of economic readjustment that is in keeping with the social views of the masses and the practical problems involved.

5. The Russian people are poor in education. Yet I have never been any other place where the intellectual hunger is as keen and insatiable as it is in Russia. To think that this desire for knowledge has been the object of much of the repression and oppression which the Russian people have undergone! One of the great and crying needs of Russia today, one which all substantial elements of the population seem unanimous in their desire to realize, is education. Sad as it is to witness the levelling down of the institutions of higher learning in Russia, it is but a part of the retribution which has swept in upon the privileged classes. The Universities of Moscow and Petrograd and similar institutions may have been demoted from their high calling, but they are being definitely related to the most immediate and pressing educational needs of the Russian people.

6. Russia has genuine unity, cultural, political, economic, and religious. After admitting the present potency of the separatist and disruptive forces which are at work, one must still face the great underlying unity of culture. A common medium of speech and a universal body of literature, song, art and custom continue. These create a desire for political unity. Many Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Siberians and even Poles have privately recognized

the ultimate necessity of a federal union of the component parts of what was formerly the Russian empire. A separatist movement in Siberia in 1918 received no substantial support. The economic interests of the various sections of the old empire are already knit together in a fashion so plain and substantial that the separatist tendencies which are present have before them an exceedingly difficult struggle if they are to prevail. The cultural, political and economic unity is reinforced by a spiritual unity which obtains throughout Great Russia, Ukraine and Siberia, and which has planted its roots deeply in the furthestmost corners of the old empire. It is a force—manifested chiefly in the Orthodox church—which is under a cloud today, but which is potent in its capacity for future influence upon the destinies of Russia. Finally there is geographical unity. As I travelled over Russia and Siberia, I was frequently reminded of the Honorable James Bryce's dictum in regard to our own Mississippi Valley—it was meant to be the home of one people. The geographical unity has been emphasized by a remarkable system of river, railway and canal transportation, which strengthens at every point the other elements of unity. I cannot believe that the forces of unity and integration have been more than temporarily suspended by the conditions which now obtain.

7. In its governmental institutions, one must bear in mind that Russia has had a minimum of political experience with democracy; that it is without trusted political leaders, without tried and proven popular institutions of government and without the stabilizing influence of political traditions.

It is not altogether clear to me that the village mir or the Zemstvos or the Duma, either municipal or national, are to endure. It is very doubtful if they command popular confidence and support. My own impressions are that they do not now do so. The soviet, on the other hand, has gathered around it the loyalty and enthusiasm of the revolutionary movement, and has the honor of having saved the social and economic character of the revolutionary movement. It has innumerable defects. But its constitution is still in the formative state and is undergoing rapid modifications. The great importance of the soviet lies in the fact that it is the only political institution in which the Russian people seem to have confidence. The average Russian peasant,

or the workingman, has little trust or interest even in a Constituent Assembly; he will tell you his fear that though he were in a majority he could not control it because of his political inexperience. In the soviet, on the other hand, he believes he can ultimately make his point and maintain it. He will admit that it may be perverted and often has been, but will deny that such perversion can be long or continuously maintained. In this confidence which the masses of the population have in the soviet and in its own capacity for rapid change and development lie the possibilities of its future. My impression is that it must be reckoned with in any consideration of the future of Russia.

In conclusion, let me suggest a few of the things which it seems to me we may confidently expect to come out of Russia's present struggle.

1. The rehabilitation of the Russian state on some federative basis, which will include the Balkan provinces, the Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Siberia, but will almost certainly exclude Poland and Finland.

2. The application of state ownership and control to transportation, education, certain banking and financial functions, and welfare work.

3. A coöperative rural and industrial economy, based upon past experiences and prevailing ideals.

4. Considerable latitude for private initiative and corporate activity. The field for such developments, however, will be limited as compared with what today exists in the United States.

5. The definite abandonment of militaristic and imperialistic programs of the past and of the wild radicalism of the present; a wholehearted committal to international peace, to the intensive development of the native character, culture, institutions and resources.

6. There are yet many long years of civil war and strife ahead of Russia. It will not be surprising if revolution follows revolution, so wide spread is the unrest, so inadequate the leadership, and so poor are the facilities for effective expression of public opinion. Yet, despite this unhappy prospect, one who has been in Russia and has come to know her people can hardly doubt her future. If it is impossible to explain Russia, if it is beyond us even to understand and comprehend her, one can yet have faith in

her. And it is a remarkable fact that those of my associates who have known Russia longest trust her most.

For Americans who have such faith, there is open the privilege of an unselfish and sympathetic assistance to a people who need help and who welcome and appreciate it when rendered. There can be no sure method of helping Russia that is not founded on the law of love and mutual respect. The soul of the new Russia will spurn any other.